

May 15, 2008

## Defying President Bush, Senate Passes Farm Bill

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WASHINGTON — The Senate voted overwhelmingly on Thursday to approve a five-year, \$307 billion farm bill, sending it to President Bush for what is expected to be his futile veto.

The 81-to-15 Senate vote, like the 318-to-106 House vote on Wednesday, attracted broad bipartisan support and received far more than the two-thirds that would be needed to override Mr. Bush's veto, should he keep his pledge to wield his pen.

Mr. Bush has said he wants to sharply limit government subsidies to farmers at a time of near-record commodity prices and soaring global demand for grain. Most legislators were not swayed by Mr. Bush's description of the bill as bloated, expensive and packed with "a variety of gimmicks."

Senator [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, the Democratic majority leader, defended the measure as "one of compromise."

"That's what legislation is all about," Mr. Reid said just before the vote.

The bill includes a \$10.3 billion increase in spending on nutrition programs, including food stamps, that supporters called "historic," as well as increases for rural development and land conservation programs.

It also extends many existing federal subsidies that the president and other critics say are difficult to justify in such flush times for agricultural producers.

Mr. Bush had sought an adjusted gross income limit of \$200,000 above which farmers could not qualify for any subsidy payments. The bill passed by the Senate and House, however, allows farm income of up to \$750,000 and nonfarm income of \$500,000 per individual.

That \$750,000 limit applies to only one subsidy program, so-called direct payments that are disbursed based on land acreage and regardless of current market conditions or even whether the land is still actively farmed.

While Mr. Bush has long called for curtailing subsidy programs, the farm bill is viewed as vital legislation both across rural America and in impoverished urban centers.

Only two Democratic senators, [Jack Reed](#) and Sheldon Whitehouse, both of Rhode Island, voted against the bill. The 13 Republicans who voted against it included Senator [Richard G. Lugar](#) of Indiana, a former chairman of the Agriculture Committee, who has called the measure fiscally irresponsible.

The three presidential candidates, Senators [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) of New York and [Barack Obama](#) of Illinois, both Democrats, and [John McCain](#), Republican of Arizona, were absent. Senator [Edward M.](#)

[Kennedy](#), Democrat of Massachusetts, also did not vote.

The willingness of so many Republicans to break with the White House reflected both the strong support for the bill and a growing alarm among many lawmakers about their election prospects in November.

Mr. Bush himself made a similar political calculation in 2002, ultimately deciding to sign the farm bill that year even though he had strongly opposed it. A senior official at the time said the White House had concluded it would be “political suicide” in the midterm elections to veto the bill that year.

This year, though, Mr. Bush seems intent on refusing to sign the bill. He has criticized it for months, and on Wednesday he issued a forceful veto threat. He urged Congress to approve a one-year extension of current law, which he said would be better than adopting the new measure.

“Today’s farm economy is very strong, and that is something to celebrate,” he said. “It is also an appropriate time to better target subsidies and put forth real reform.” The bill, he said, “spends too much and fails to reform farm programs for the future.”

On Wednesday evening, Scott Stanzel, a White House spokesman, reiterated the president’s opposition. “With its massive expansion of subsidies, special interest earmarks and budget gimmicks, this bill is wrong for American taxpayers,” he said. “The president will veto it.”

But in debate on the House floor on Wednesday, some Republicans were just as forceful in pledging to defy Mr. Bush should he use his veto pen.

“I know there is a veto threat from the White House,” said Representative Robin Hayes, Republican of North Carolina. “If the president decides to follow through I will be there voting to override him because we need this update for our nation’s policies.”

Should it reach that point, it would be only the second veto overridden during Mr. Bush’s presidency. The first was in November when Congress overwhelmingly rejected the president’s veto of a \$23.2 billion water resources bill that authorized popular projects around the country.

In the House chamber on Wednesday, longtime critics of farm subsidies in both parties echoed Mr. Bush’s complaints about the current bill.

“Where’s the beef?” asked Representative Ron Kind, Democrat of Wisconsin, standing in the House floor next to a poster showing sharp increases in commodity prices — 126 percent for wheat, 57 percent for soybeans, 45 percent for corn. “Where’s the real reform?” he said.

Some critics have also pointed to earmarks in the bill, including a tax break for racehorse owners added by the Senate Republican leader, [Mitch McConnell](#) of Kentucky, and \$170 million to benefit the salmon industry inserted by House Democrats from the West Coast.

Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) of California, in her own speech on the House floor, responded directly to Mr. Kind, whose proposals would drastically overhauling farm subsidies she had supported before the Democrats regained control of Congress in 2006.

Although the legislation is universally known as the farm bill, it actually directs far more money to feeding the poor than it does to helping farmers — about \$209 billion for nutrition programs like food stamps, according to the [Congressional Budget Office](#), compared with \$35 billion for agricultural commodity programs.

In her speech, Ms. Pelosi praised the bill and said the increase on food stamps alone was reason to support it. She said that while more change would be needed, the bill made important improvements to farm policy.

“With this legislation we will help families facing high [food prices](#),” she said.

At a news conference, the Agriculture Committee chairman, Representative Collin C. Peterson of Minnesota, said he expected the bill to reach the president by May 20 and a veto override to be approved before Congress leaves for a Memorial Day recess.

Both Mr. Peterson and the committee’s senior Republican, Representative Robert W. Goodlatte of Virginia, said the bill represented a strong bipartisan compromise.

“I am very pleased that both parties cast a majority of votes for this farm bill,” Mr. Goodlatte said. “We don’t have a two-to-one majority. We have a three-to-one majority.”

He added: “I believe that we now have the opportunity to say to America that this is a farm bill that truly does assure that we continue to have the safest, most affordable, most abundant food supply in the world. We have addressed the needs of America’s farmers and ranchers.”

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